

HALLELUJAH



Released by MGM in 1929, Hallelujah was one of the first films from a major studio to feature an all-black cast.

Hallelujah starred Daniel L. Haynes as Zeke, a field laborer who is seduced away from his family and community by the temptations of the world. Producer-director King Vidor hoped to create an authentic portrayal of rural African-American life, especially religious experience, by filming on location in Arkansas and Tennessee despite the technical challenges involved in doing so.

Enhanced by spirituals performed by the Dixie Jubilee Singers, Hallelujah also starred blues singer Victoria Spivey as Zeke's hometown love interest and Nina Mae McKinney as the city woman who cons and seduces him. Later billed in Europe as "The Black Garbo," the 16-year-old McKinney performs the Irving Berlin song "Swanee Shuffle" in Hallelujah.

Although not free of stereotypes, Hallelujah was praised by black and white critics alike and found many black defenders. In the October 1929 issue of the NAACP magazine *The Crisis*, W.E.B. DuBois wrote that the film offered "the sense of real life" and concluded that "everybody should see Hallelujah." More recently, film historian Thomas Cripps wrote in 1993 that Hallelujah "neatly caught the piety and enthusiasm of rural religion, while only occasionally lapsing into stereotyped gamblers and mammies."

King Vidor received an Academy Award nomination for Best Director for Hallelujah. He would later direct the black-and-white scenes in *The Wizard of Oz* as well as the 1956 film *War and Peace*.

The poster for Hallelujah shows a drawing of a female dancer above several musicians. The movie title runs across the top of the poster, and a caption to the left reads: "A KING VIDOR PRODUCTION." The original poster artwork for this 1929 film was created by prominent caricaturist Al Hirschfeld (1903-2003), whose work also appeared on the five *Comedians* stamps in 1991 and the ten *Stars of the Silent Screen* stamps in 1994. The poster was used with permission of the Margo Feiden Galleries Ltd., New York.